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SUBJECT: MONTENEGRIN MOD AND MFA READY TO ROLL UP THEIR SLEEVES FOR  
NATO INTENSIFIED DIALOGUE

REF: (A) PODGORICA 217 (B) STATE 83586

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following the Ambassador's discussion of Montenegro's NATO aspirations with PM Djukanovic (Ref A), both the Defense and Foreign Ministers reaffirmed the GOM's interest in seeking a MAP invitation at the 2009 NATO Summit. They also welcomed the idea of regular bilateral consultations to assess GoM's progress (Ref A). An informal group, consisting of GOM and Embassy representatives, will meet periodically to monitor Montenegro's process toward intensifying its relationship with the Alliance (Ref B). End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On August 20, the Ambassador, DCM, and DATT met with Montenegrin Defense Minister Boro Vucinic and later with Foreign Minister Milan Rocen. Both had heard from PM Djukanovic about his discussion with the Ambassador and emphasized their desire to see Montenegro invited into MAP by the 2009 Summit. They pledged to speed up the pace of work in intensifying relations with NATO and welcomed the illustrative set of priorities provided by the USG. Both said they understood the Ambassador's repeated caveats that these priorities do not represent a "checklist" and that fulfillment of them would not guarantee U.S. guarantee support for an invitation to MAP at the April summit.

¶3. (SBU) Rocen urged that Montenegro not be lumped together with other NATO candidates, but be considered strictly on its own merits. He emphasized that the GoM views progress toward NATO as complementary to steps toward the EU -- "two paths to the same goal." Both ministers acknowledged the currently weak public support for Montenegro joining NATO but insisted that the number of Montenegrins favoring membership is rising.

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador described the concept he had discussed with the Prime Minister, which would involve regular bilateral consultations at a senior level to monitor Montenegro's progress in stepping up its links with the Alliance. All agreed that these consultations should be informal. Each minister stressed the need to start as quickly as possible to accomplish all that must be done in the months before NATO's spring 2009 Summit. This working group will likely begin meeting in early September.

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